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RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 9205
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI PRIORITY 3042

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBAI 000213

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR G/TIP FOR GPATEL, INL, DRL, NEA/ARP FOR BMASILKO,
L/DL, CA/OCS/ACS FOR GLYNN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/8/2018

TAGS: PREL PHUM KCRM KWMN ASEC ELAB AE

SUBJECT: AMCIT ANTI-TIP ACTIVIST FACES ALLEGATIONS OF BABY SELLING

REF: A. DUBAI 92; B. ABU DHABI 337; C. 07 DUBAI 629

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CLASSIFIED BY: Paul Sutphin, Consulate General, Consulate Dubai,
UAE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Outspoken UAE human rights activist Sharla Musabih (dual national AmCit/Emirati and founder of City of Hope, the first women's and children's shelter in the UAE) has been the focus of increasingly pejorative press coverage (ref A) which recently escalated to accusations of selling babies. Conversations with individuals who have been questioned by Dubai Police indicate that local police are following up on the allegations and might bring a trafficking case against the activist and another AmCit who took legal custody of an abandoned child three and one half years ago. End summary.

¶12. (U) In a May 20th "Gulf News" article (broad circulation English daily), three women of differing nationalities (Russian, Uzbek and Filipina) accused long-time anti-TIP activist Sharla Musabih of selling their newborn babies to an Uzbek named "Samira" and two AmCits identified in the article as "Linda" and "Layla." The accusatory article was positioned directly next to an article of equal length focused on the UAE's "tough stance taken against trafficking."

¶13. (C/NF) On May 29th, Pol/Econ Officer received a phone call from distraught AmCit Layla Leicia Medlej (the American identified in the article). Mrs. Medlej related that the previous day she had been summoned by Dubai Police to the Muraqqabat police station for more than four hours of questioning on the circumstances surrounding her obtaining legal custody of her foster son three and one half years ago. (Note: In the UAE, legal adoption is rarely granted by the court system. Instead, the system typically places orphaned or abandoned children in the legal custody of foster parents, which while granting a semblance of parental rights in the UAE, does not meet USG requirements for conveyance of US citizenship to children fostered by AmCits. End note.) While in Medlej's opinion the focus of the inquiry was on possible illegal and trafficking related actions taken by Musabih, the police also attempted to intimidate Medlej by calling her a liar and threatening to take her son "and everything" away. Police retained Medlej's passport.

¶14. (C/NF) Medlej elaborated that three and a half years ago she was asked by a Canadian woman to take in the child of "a pregnant housekeeper, who had been kicked out of her home by her sponsor." According to Medlej, the housekeeper had originally agreed to sell the child to "the camel jockeys" for AED 35,000 (just under USD 10,000) but later experienced a change of heart

and decided her baby should "go to a good Muslim home." The Canadian woman brought the child to Medlej, urged her to begin nursing the child immediately and suggested Medlej contact Musabih for assistance in obtaining legal custody of the child. (Note: Breast feeding a child establishes a family bond under local custom. End note.) According to both Musabih and Medlej, Musabih's only involvement in the case was to reach out to the police and government agencies to assist in the legal proceedings associated with potential custody. Both women deny involvement in trafficking.

¶ 15. (C/NF) On June 1, Musabih notified Pol/Econ officer that the previously mentioned Canadian woman, Susan Phillips, also had been summoned to the police station for questioning on the same case. Pol/Econ officer has not spoken with Phillips, but Musabih states that the police focused their questions on the potential legal violations of Medlej (not Musabih).

¶ 16. (C/NF) During the early morning of June 3, as she was preparing to board a US-bound flight, Musabih was detained at Dubai International Airport and taken to police headquarters for questioning. Initially assuming the detention was due to the trafficking allegations, Musabih was relieved to discover the pending case (which was dismissed later that same day) had been instigated by a disgruntled former husband of a woman Musabih assisted four years ago. Musabih confided to Pol/Econ Officer that she believes "the police are circling in on me, turning everyone against me" and that she is fearful of an unfounded arrest on trafficking charges. Musabih subsequently cleared UAE immigration late in the evening of June 3 and departed the country to visit her ailing father.

¶ 17. (C/NF) COMMENT: Despite UAEG assurances (ref B) that Musabih is not under threat of arrest, it appears that Dubai Police have taken the allegations of trafficking published by the "Gulf News" seriously and that Musabih is under investigation. The English language paper and its sister publication, "Emaarat

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Alyoum", have been at the forefront of a more than six month barrage of periodic public accusations against Musabih. While the predicitating events may have been a disagreement between Musabih and the Emirati director of the Dubai Foundation for Women and Children (DFWC, ref C) over the management and operating philosophy for the DFWC, the situation has now escalated to the level where two AmCits (Musabih and Medlej) are at risk of arrest and one is being threatened with custody revocation for her "son." While Post cannot know for certain the truth of the allegations, nothing in our long experience to date with Musabih/City of Hope gives any indication that Musabih has or would "sell a baby." The charges against Musabih are more likely, in our assessment, an attempt by disgruntled former victims, husbands and other family members of former victims, and possibly UAE DFWC officials (fed up with Musabih's habit of pointing out both UAEG failures and successes in fighting TIP) to discredit Musabih in the eyes of the UAEG and with the USG.
End comment.

SUTPHIN